

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 MC-02 TRSE-00 EB-07 H-02 PRS-01 /068 W

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R 231808Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1493

INFO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 7631

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MASS, PE

SUBJECT: ALLEGED PURCHASE OF SOVIET AIRCRAFT

REF: LIMA 7552, LIMA 7522

1. FONMIN DE LA PUENTE INTERVIEWED AT LIMA AIRPORT AUGUST 22 UPON HIS RETURN FROM SRI LANKA COMMENTED ON THE RECENT NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE WHICH CLAIMED "THAT PERU HAD PURCHASED SOVIET AIRCRAFT". ACCORDING TO THE AUGUST 23 EDITION OF LA PRENSA, DE LA PUENTE TOLD REPORTERS THAT "PERU HAS INVITED THE GOVERNMENTS OF FRANCE, GREAT BRITAIN, THE SOVIET UNION AND THE U.S. TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS WITH THE AIM OF (PERU) ACQUIRING MILITARY EQUIPMENT WHICH WILL REPLACE OBSOLETE (MATERIEL)". DE LA PUENTE SAID THAT "INTERNATIONAL BIDS" WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE IN ORDER TO DETERMINE (WHICH COUNTRY OFFERS) THE BEST TECHNICAL CONDITIONS AND MOST COMPETITIVE PRICES". FINALLY THE FONMIN STATED THAT "OUR AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON JUST MADE A DECLARATION ON THAT POINT WHICH I THINK IS VERY CLEAR AND ELIMINATES ANY DOUBTS". THE REMAINDER OF THE BRIEF AIRPORT PRESS INTERVIEW WAS DEVOTED TO THE SRI LANKA NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT, WHICH DE LA PUENTE SAID HE WOULD DISCUSS IN DEPTH AT AN AUGUST 23 PRESS CONFERENCE.

2. COMMENT: (A) DE LA PUENTE'S AIRPORT STATEMENT IS THE FIRST GOP RESPONSE TO QUERIES ABOUT AN ALLEGED SOVIET AIRCRAFT PURCHASE.

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REPORTERS QUESTIONS TO GOP OFFICIALS HAD EARLIER MET WITH

"NO COMMENT". ALTHOUGH THE SOVIET PURCHASE STORY HAS NOT APPEARED IN THE LOCAL PRESS, IT HAS BEEN WIDELY REPORTED IN THE PRESS OF NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND COPIES OF THESE ARTICLES HAVE CIRCULATED IN LIMA. THE MOST RECENT ARTICLE AVAILABLE IN LIMA IS THE UPI ACCOUNT CARRIED IN SUNDAY'S MIAMI HERALD AND ATTRIBUTED TO A STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL. THE NEW YORK TIMES (ITS RECENT COVERAGE ON PERU HAS DISTURBED GOVERNMENT LEADERS INCLUDING PRESIDENT MORALES BERMUDEZ ARTICLE WAS QUITE DETAILED, AND THE GOP DECIDED TO REPLY TO IT AS IT HAS TO AN EARLIER NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL AND FRONT PAGE ARTICLE BY JONATHAN KANDALL ON THE RECENT POLITICAL CHANGES. WE ARE UNAWARE OF A SPECIFIC GARCIA BEDOYA PRESS STATEMENT ON THE POSSIBLE SOVIET PURCHASE (PERHAPS MADE IN WASHINGTON OVER THE WEEKEND), BUT DE LA PUENTE MAY HAVE BEEN REFERRING TO GARCIA BEDOYA'S MORE GENERAL COMMENTS ON AUGUST 16 (LIMA 7522) CALLING FOR GREATER U.S. APPRECIATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS.

(B) DE LA PUENTE'S MATTER OF FACT IMPLICATION THAT THE STORY ON A SOVIET PURCHASE COMES FROM AN INCOMPLETE READING OF THE FACTS (I.E. PERU'S INVITATION TO FOUR COUNTRIES TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS ON MILITARY EQUIPMENT) SHOULD DEFUSE ITS IMPACT HERE. THE DE LA PUENTE VERSION DOES DOVETAIL SOMEWHAT WITH AN "UP-DATED" ACCOUNT ON THE STATUS OF THE SOVIET PURCHASE REPORTED BY EMBASSY IN LIMA 7552. THE FONMIN, OF COURSE, DID NOT RULE OUT A MAJOR SOVIET PURCHASE BASED ON THE CRITERIA OF "BETTER TECHNICAL CONDITIONS AND MORE COMPETITIVE PRICES", BUT HE DID SEEM TO MAKE ANY PURCHASE APPEAR TO BE MORE CONDITIONAL AND LESS IMMINENT.

(C) IN A MOVE POSSIBLY RELATED TO THE DE LA PUENTE STATEMENT, FONOFF HEAD OF AMERICAN DEPARTMENT TELEPHONED CHARGE AUGUST 23 TO INQUIRE WHEN FY 76 FMS CREDITS MAY BE OFFERED.
SMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PROCUREMENT, MILITARY AIRCRAFT, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LIMA07631
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760322-0349
From: LIMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760829/aaaaazbd.tel
Line Count: 95
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LIMA 7552, 76 LIMA 7522
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 JUL 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <27 OCT 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ALLEGED PURCHASE OF SOVIET AIRCRAFT
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MASS, PE, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006